Finally in the late fourteenth century, a rebellious Bulala group east of Lake Chad upset the Magumi Sefuwa rulers of Kanem, who ultimately came to the southwest portion of the Chad basin to establish what later became the empire of Bornu.

The collapse of the great Kanem empire in the fourteenth century is attributed by tradition to internal civil wars resulting from the Bulala revolt against the Sefuwa dynasty. The ultimate cause is rationalized in legend by an alleged irreligious act of the seventeenth king or Mai of Kanem, one Dunama, (*ca.* 1220–1260 A.D.) who is supposed to have "laid the foundations for the ensuing disaster of the empire by opening the sacred talisman of Bornu" which subsequently provoked men of ambition to entreat against the state.[8] It may or may not be true, but it is very likely not the entire explanation even if we were to know what the "sacred talisman" was—which we do not; knowledge of its meaning and content have long since disappeared. Other reasons for the collapse of the kingdom besides that of a civil war against the Bulala can be suggested. The kingdom was in all likelihood not highly centralized and the nobles could quite easily unite, obtain outside help, and try to gain control. Indeed all of the traditions of the Bulala tell of them obtaining help from the Tubu of the central Sahara (a rebellious group who were tributary to Kanem) against the ruling Kanem dynasty.

Another factor is the nature of succession to the throne. Throughout the Sudan, and for as long as any traditions go back in Bornu, succession to the throne has always been open to those whose fathers have been monarchs. However, given many short reigns, this custom increases the number of contenders enormously and therefore exacerbates competition for royal office in the state so that the danger of civil wars and lack of unity is accelerated; the state is then much weakened as an effective political force. In other words, given a few short reigns, the possibility that more will follow becomes even greater unless a strong man with very strong backing emerges to quell the factions supporting various royal contenders. Finally it should be realized that Bornu was a much greener land than Kanem and it might have actually attracted the Kanem ruling group and their followers away from the drier, more inhospitable northern shores of Lake Chad. Certainly the kingdom of Kanem was not of such a nature that it suddenly collapsed when people (later to be called Kanuri) left. The Bulala clan assumed the leadership and Kanem continued as a sovereign state while the Kanuri tried, unsuccessfully at first, to reconquer their lost empire.

By the end of the fifteenth century the Sefuwa and their clan, the Magumi, had obtained sovereignty to the southwest of Lake Chad, and under a series of able monarchs they established their new kingdom of Bornu as a great power in the Sudan. The first of these rulers to organize and establish a really powerful state was a man named Ali Ghajedeni (*ca.* 1470–1500 A.D.), the forty-eighth monarch on the Sefuwa dynastic list. He built a new capital called Birni Ngazargamo, "the walled fortress," at the north end of Bornu and united this new kingdom under his control. Ali is supposed to have reconquered Kanem and re-established control over the Saharan trade while making war continually against Songhai to the west over the subjugation of the Hausa states and the east-west trade routes across the Sudan. His reign was followed by a series of others no less nota-

[8] H. Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa,* Vol. II, (London: Longmans, Green & Co., Ltd., 1857), p. 637.

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

175 642 643 ent time. It was during Shehu Omar's reign that Barth, the famous African explorer, visited Bornu and obtained the first written account of its history.

175 643 The descendants of Shehu Laminu ruled throughout the rest of the nineteenth century without undue excitement. There were always succession problems indicated by struggles for the throne among possible heirs and during the 1850s there was even a revolt in which a prince of the realm overturned his older brother for a few months until the deposed monarch was able to gather his forces and recapture the government. But such events had always been the common currency of Bornu's history.

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175 648 Later in the century, however, a tragedy befell the kingdom. A marauding brigand of the Sudan who had gathered around himself an army of well-disciplined and trained soldiers slashed his way westward across Africa conquering and pillaging as he went. In 1893 he crossed over into Bornu and demolished the capital, defeating the Bornu army and sending the Shehu with some of his followers fleeing to the north and west of Bornu. This man, Rabeh, is still remembered today in Bornu for the tyrannical hold he attempted to establish and for the plundering and sacking of many Bornu villages which he carried out while subduing the state. Eventually he built himself a capital in southeast Bornu and married his daughter to the son of the Emir of Sokoto. Rabeh provides some interesting grounds for speculation. For had colonial expansion into the area not conflicted with Rabeh's own plans, he might very likely have founded Bornu's third dynasty. As it was Britain, France, and Germany were carving up West Africa for themselves.

The French arrived first and soon found themselves at war with Rabeh. Eventually he was defeated and killed, and although his sons attempted to keep control of their father's new found kingdom, it was a futile gesture in the face of French arms. By 1902 the British had taken over what is now Bornu province in northeastern Nigeria; the Germans obtained the Cameroons—containing Rabeh's old capital, and the French set up their headquarters at Fort Lamy in what is now Chad. The old Kanembu Shehu was put on the throne again by the French at Dikwa (Rabeh's capital) and was then maintained by the Germans. In the scramble over territory that characterized this period, the British persuaded the Shehu to return to Nigerian territory, where they have been ever since as rulers of Bornu.

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The British first brought the Shehu to Kuka, the nineteenth-century capital of the Kanembu Shehus, which they had promised to rebuild for him as part of the bargain for his return. They set up their own headquarters in the village of Magumeri and tried to administer the state from these two centers. The job of administration from Magumeri proved impossible, as did the prospect of rebuilding Kuka; it had been sacked and demolished during the Rabeh period. In 1905 the colonial government decided to set up a new capital at Maiduguri in southern Bornu which would serve as a center for both the emirate and the Province of Bornu. Today it still serves both these functions and is the major urban center of the area.

The British also reorganized the political structure of the state, and geared it into the wider colonial government they were evolving for Northern Nigeria as a whole under the leadership of Lord Lugard. Under Lugard's direction they also stopped the trans-Saharan trade, especially in slaves, and oriented Bornu's economy southwards towards the Guinea Coast and the rest of Nigeria. In 1914 they quietly, and with practically no incident, took over the Northern Cameroons from the Ger-

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3: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1957) 1960 M814 Kanuri M814

175 642 [131] a large Empire with the result that Kanem became a well known state in the Islamic world of the 12th century. By the 13th century, Kanem had extended itself to include a large region in the Chad basin, including present day Bornu, and more importantly was in control of the central Sahara with its trade route to Tripoli.(1) Friendship was contracted with the Hafsid rulers of Tunis, and we are told by Ibn Said writing at this time that a giraffe was sent by the King of Kanem to the Sultan of Tripoli as a present. He further notes that the practice of Islam is widespread amongst the population of Kanem at this time.(2) Kachim Biri, the reigning monarch from 1242-43 A.D., ordered the construction of a traveler's house for Kanuri pilgrims in the city of Cairo.(3) At the other end of the Muslim world, in Spain, a poet from Kanem was employed at this period in the court of El Mansur (1190-1214) at Seville, to sing the Sultan's praises. We are told by Lady Lugard that early references describe this person as a "learned and cultured poet, a black of the Sudan, Abu Ishah al Kanemi".(4)

175 648 [779]

Although information on the internal affairs of Kanem is scarce for this period, these outward ripples indicate extensive contacts and peaceful relations between a well organized state and the rest of the Muslim world of the 12th and 13th centuries. Since the early Arabic travellers who came to Ghana, Mali and Songhai were often told of the existence of Kanem to the east, it can be assumed that contacts across the Sudan were kept up and utilized as much as the northerly ones.(5)

173 669 Local tradition in Bornu at the time of Barth's visit (1851) explained the eventual collapse of the great empire of Kanem in an interest-

(1) Ibn Said writing of the rule of Dunama Ahmed (1221-1295 A.D.) says it included present day Bornu. Later writers claimed that Bornu reached to the Nile in this period. (See, Barth, H. op. cit.Vol.II, p. 641.)
(2) Urvoy, Y. op. cit., 1949, p. 369.
(3) Burckhardt, J.L., Travels in Nubia, (London) 1819.
(4) Shaw, F.L., (Lady Lugard), op. cit. p 65.
(5) See, Battutu Ibn, Travels in Asia and Africa, trans.H.A.R. Gibb (London) 1929.

173 ing fashion. The legend claims[1] that Dunama, the great 17th Mai of
669 Kanem (1221-1259 A.D.) "laid the foundation for the ensuing disaster of the Empire by opening the sacred talisman of Bornu", for it (the talisman) called forth and provoked every powerful man to ambition and intrigues, and there followed after this reign a period of civil wars, and rapid changes in the monarchy, often involving regicide. It was at this time that the vassal state of the Bulala on the eastern boundary of Kanem grew towards an ever stronger independence, and finally toppled the Kanuri kingdom. We are told in the Chronicle translated by Barth that during the reign of the 27th Mai, Daud (1377-1386 A.D.) the Kanuri were decisively
[131] beaten by the Bulala.[2] By 1394 A.D., the 31st Mai, Omar (1394-1398 A.D.) finally gave up Kanem and came to Bornu proper to set up a kingdom in retreat somewhere between the present city of Maiduguri and the town of Oujba.

There followed a period of unrest and internal strife for about 75 years, during which many kings took the throne and were in turn overthrown or murdered. The kingdom was in a constant state of civil war
175 within and set upon by enemies from without. Palmer[3] in his researches
648 has found references to a letter sent at this time to Cairo from the Kanuri monarch, asking the Caliph to order the Arabs of Wadai to stop helping the Bulala raid amongst the Kanuri for slaves, since they (the Kanuri) were all good Muslims, and not infidels to be treated as potential slaves for the taking. More evidence of the "Sturm und Drang" quality of the period is indicated by the fact that a Mai of this time lived away from Bornu in the Hausa city of Kano which had been in the past a vassal state of the Kanuri empire.

(1) Barth, H., op. cit. Vol. II; King list, pp 633-671.
(2) Ibid; p. 634.
(3) Palmer, H. The Bornu Sahara and Sudan,(London) 1936, p. 218

175
643 Bornu in the 1820's. (1)

In 1835 Shehu Laminu retired and his son Umar (1835-1880) took over the effective headship of the Bornu state. Like his father, he attempted to maintain and expand the kingdom, while keeping the old Mai on the throne. During one of Umar's western campaigns against Zinder, 175 669 721 the puppet Mai, Ibrahim appealed to Wadai for help in restoring him as the rightful ruler of Bornu against the Kanembu Shehu who had usurped the power. Umar returned from his Zinder campaign to find himself being attacked from the east by Wadai. Hearing of the Mai's instigation of this aggression, Umar put the puppet ruler in irons and tried to fight the Wadai forces at Logone, south of Lake Chad, but he was soundly defeated. Kuka was sacked, and the Wadai leader put Ali the young brother of the Mai on the throne. Umar, in high dudgeon, executed Ibrahim and bribed the Wadai forces to withdraw from Bornu. The young Ali and his small following were now attacked and defeated, during which encounter Ali lost his life. And (643) so ended the dynasty of the Magumi Sefuwa of Bornu. Shehu Umar declared himself the sole ruler of Bornu and rebuilt the city of Kuka which Barth 173 visited in the 1850's. Local tradition marks this occasion by telling how 643 Shehu Umar was the first of the Bornu monarchs ever to sit on a chair. 644 Before this time leaders had always sat on rugs. It is also related of him that he took a member of the royal family, Ali Mairami, who was the son of a daughter of Mai Dunama (1810-1818), (i.e. he was not in line for the succession) and made him a Maisuli or joking king, who could joke with and chastise the Shehu in a manner prohibited to anyone else. This practice is still carried on today by the descendant of Ali Mairami in the court of the Shehu at Maiduguri.

(1) Denham, Dr. Clapperton H. Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa, 1826.